

### What is *vocabulary*?

- *Vocabulary* is the set of words for which we know the meanings.
- *Receptive vocabulary* is the vocabulary we can understand when it is presented to us orally or in text. *Productive vocabulary* is the vocabulary we use in writing or speaking. Sometimes this is referred to as *writing vocabulary* or *speaking vocabulary*.
- *Oral* or *listening vocabulary* refers to words that are used or recognized in speaking or listening. *Reading vocabulary* refers to words that are used or recognized in print. Sight vocabulary is a subset of reading vocabulary and refers to words that do not need to be decoded.

### Why should vocabulary be taught?

- ♦ Reading vocabulary is crucial to the comprehension processes of a skilled reader. In the early stages of reading, oral vocabulary plays an important role. As a reader begins to read, words encountered in texts are mapped onto the oral vocabulary the learner brings to the task. Benefits in understanding text by applying letter-sound correspondences to printed material come about only if the target word is in the learner's oral vocabulary. Otherwise, strategies will need to be employed to make sense of new words. In general, the greater the oral and reading vocabularies of the reader, the more likely it is that the reader will be able to read text with understanding.

### Evidence-Based Instructional Practices: ADULTS (Kruidenier, 2002)

- ♦ Initial research suggests that teaching vocabulary in a specific setting, such as a family literacy or workplace setting, may be more effective than teaching vocabulary in a more general setting. NRP findings in support of the use of repetitive exposures in rich contexts support using family literacy or workplace contexts for vocabulary instruction.
- ♦ Do not assume that adult students, because they are older and more experienced, have well-developed vocabularies. Adult readers' vocabulary growth may be dependent upon reading ability. Although their life experience may give them an advantage on vocabulary knowledge at lower reading levels, this advantage may disappear at higher reading levels.

**Evidence-Based Instructional Practices: CHILDREN (NRP, 2000)**

- ♦ Provide opportunities for learners to learn new words in rich contexts.
- ♦ Words that are taught should be appropriate for learners' age and ability level.
- ♦ Teach vocabulary directly in ways that actively engage learners. Introducing words before reading texts has been found to be effective.
- ♦ Expose learners to words through read-alouds, discussion, and independent reading (in material they can read fluently).
- ♦ Provide opportunities for repetition and multiple exposures to new words.
- ♦ Explore computers as a way to teach vocabulary.
- ♦ Use a variety of instructional methods for teaching vocabulary.

**Sources**

Kruidenier, John (2002). *Research-Based Principles for Adult Basic Education Reading Instruction*. Washington, DC: National Institute for Literacy, Partnership for Reading.

National Reading Panel (2000). *Teaching Children to Read: an Evidence-Based Assessment of the Scientific Research Literature on Reading and its Implications for Reading Instruction (Report of the Subgroups)*. Washington, D.C.: National Institute for Child Health and Human Development.